

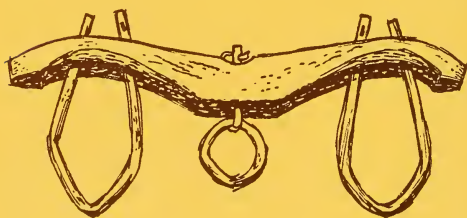
My
Lincoln Letter



MARION WALLACE RENINGER

LINCOLN ROOM

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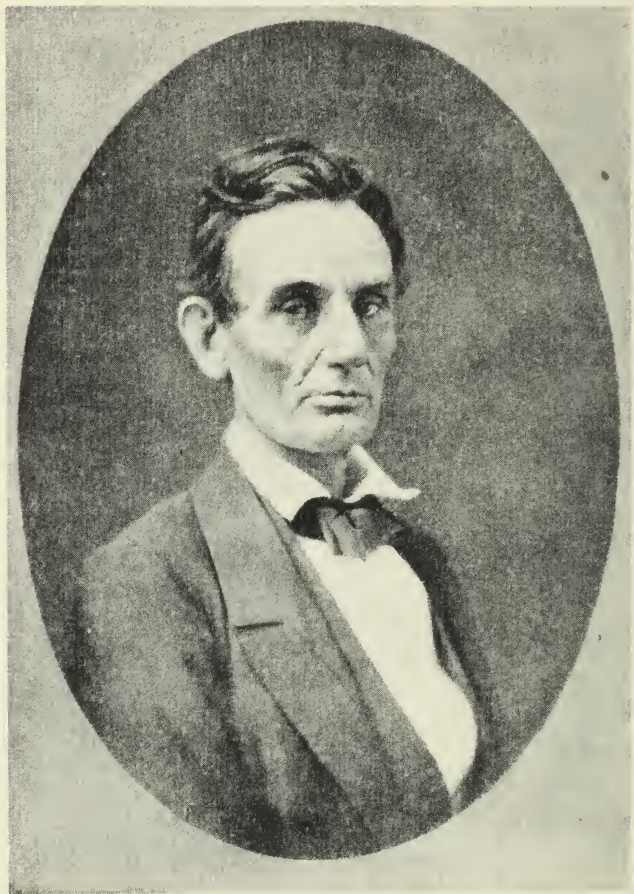
HARLAN HOYT HORNER

and

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

From a photograph made in October 1859 and owned by William Lloyd Garrison. The negative perished in the Chicago fire. This portrait was taken a week before he wrote my letter, seven months before he was nominated for the Presidency of the United States.

MY
LINCOLN LETTER

BY
MARION WALLACE RENINGER

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

1953

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MARION WALLACE RENINGER

973.7263

P.W.

To my daughter

JANE LOUISE RENINGER BURTIS

H. SEARCY

13 Apr 54

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE written words of Abraham Lincoln have an almost sacred value for the American people. His State papers, proclamations, executive orders, pardons and discharges are of far-reaching importance. His notes scribbled on small pieces of paper are cherished as priceless historical sources. But most revealing is Lincoln's correspondence, particularly his letters written to personal friends, and his political letters which reached their peak just prior to and during the campaign of 1860.

The letter whose origin is described by Marion Wallace Reninger in this brochure has unusual value because of its supposedly confidential nature when first written, and because of its almost perfect state of preservation. Besides, it reveals an interesting sidelight on the mind of Lincoln and his attitude toward what was regarded as a great public question in the industrial area of the United States.

To the student of Lincolniana, as well as to the general reader of American history, the story of the origin and nature of this letter will prove to be interesting reading.

H. M. J. KLEIN

*Emeritus Professor of History
in Franklin and Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania*

January 24, 1953



"WALLACIA"

The Wallace Homestead, East Earl, Lancaster County, Pa.

Present home of

Miss Margaret K. Wallace

ORIGIN OF THE LINCOLN LETTER

THERE is in my personal possession as a family heirloom a most interesting original letter written by Abraham Lincoln. It seems to me to be well worth recording the events which led to the writing of the letter, as well as the strange trick of fate which brought this well-preserved, authentic historic document into my hands. It reveals the mental approach of Lincoln toward a great public question during one of the really decisive periods of his pre-Presidential years.

The letter contains what was hoped to be a confidential statement of opinion on a very important and delicate question for any presidential aspirant in the critical year of 1859. Everybody seemed to know at that time how Lincoln stood on the slavery question, but certain groups in the North—the so-called industrial leaders—were probably more concerned about his attitude toward the protective tariff issue which was rising into a prominent position in the manufacturing States.

This letter is probably the most direct satisfactory answer that Lincoln ever gave to the tariff question. It was penned at the time when his qualifications as a candidate for the Republican nomination for the Presidency of the United States were being carefully

scrutinized by some of the leaders of the recently organized new political party.

To what extent or how long the letter itself remained confidential, as Lincoln requested, is not known. The substance of it was revealed before the election of 1860. The letter must have had a short pilgrimage before it came into my possession. Its perfect state of preservation is evidence that it passed through very few hands since it received the signature, "A. Lincoln" on Oct. 11th, 1859.

The letter is unusual because of the circumstances which led to its origin, because of its content which reveals both the conviction and the caution of the mind of Lincoln, and because of the subsequent history of the missive which was originally intended to be strictly confidential.

The story of the origin of the Lincoln letter is linked closely to the Wallace family of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Almost a hundred years before this letter was written by Lincoln, a Scottish merchant by the name of Robert Wallace opened a general store in East Earl Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In the course of events his grandson became Lincoln's brother-in-law and family doctor.

At the death of Robert Wallace, the pioneer proprietor of the store, his son, John, succeeded him as owner. The store was located in one end of the old stone house which is still standing and is known as the Wallace Homestead, "Wallacia." In 1798 John Wallace was married to Lydia Smith, daughter of the iron master, William Smith, who built Martic

Forge. Of the nine children born to this couple, the two sons with whom we are particularly concerned in this study became physicians; namely, Dr. William Smith Wallace and his younger brother, Dr. Edward Wallace. These two men were responsible for the Lincoln letter. They created the circumstances that produced it.

William Smith Wallace was born in 1802 and spent his boyhood days in the old homestead. He received his medical education in Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia. After his graduation he practised medicine in his home neighborhood for several years.

Then Dr. William Smith Wallace left Pennsylvania and settled in Springfield, Illinois, where he became a prominent medical practitioner. He also became owner of a drugstore in Springfield.

Meanwhile the three Todd sisters come into the story. Elizabeth had married Ninian Edwards and lived in Springfield. In her home Dr. William Smith Wallace met and subsequently married her sister, Frances Todd. In the same year (1839) in which Dr. Wallace was married to Frances, her sister Mary Todd, then twenty-one years old, came to Springfield from her Kentucky home to live with her sister (Elizabeth), Mrs. Edwards. It was in the Edwards home that Mary Todd met Mr. Lincoln and a few years later, Nov. 4, 1842, married him. Lincoln was thirty-three years old and Mary Todd was twenty-three.

Dr. William Smith Wallace was the Edwards family physician. It was said that when Mary Todd was ill and in a highly nervous state over her quandary in

regard to several suitors including Stephen A. Douglas, her sister, Mrs. Edwards, called in Dr. Wallace. He diagnosed the trouble at once and frankly told her that in this state of mental indecision his advice was to drop Douglas and Edwin Webb and all the others and become engaged to Abraham Lincoln. He intimated that Lincoln's habits were better and that he was probably destined for a more prosperous career. Mary Todd after recovering her health and spirits became the promised bride of Lincoln.

After their marriage the Lincolns naturally selected Mary's brother-in-law, Dr. Wallace, as their family doctor. As a testimonial to the esteem in which he was held by the Lincoln family, they named one of their sons William Wallace, known as "Willie."

When the Presidential party made the journey from Springfield to Washington, D. C. for the Inauguration of March 4, 1861, Dr. William S. Wallace was included in the small group. He was a frequent and welcome guest at the White House. Through the influence of Lincoln's wife, the President appointed him paymaster of volunteers, with the rank of Major. In a letter written by Mary Todd Lincoln from the White House on September 29, 1861, to a cousin, she mentioned the fact that

"Dr. Wallace has received his portion in life from the administration, (an appointment as paymaster of Volunteers). Frances often spoke of Mr. Lincoln's kindness in giving him his place."

In order to get the chain of events that occasioned the Lincoln letter clearly in mind, we turn to another



LYDIA SMITH WALLACE



JOHN WALLACE, *Merchant*

character in the episode. Dr. Edward Wallace, brother of Dr. William Wallace, was the eighth child of John and Lydia Smith Wallace. He was a graduate of Princeton and took a medical course in the University of Pennsylvania, after which he set up a medical practice a few miles from his birthplace in the village of Goodville. In a few years he decided to go to Reading, Pennsylvania. A tablet in the Reading Hospital, presented by his children long after his death, testifies to the fact that he was one of the founders of that institution.

From Reading, Dr. Edward Wallace moved to Philadelphia where he became an eminent leader in the professional and social life of the large city. His wife was Olivia Hamilton Haven of Connecticut. Their son, John Wallace, a New York banker, married Annie Allen, the grand-daughter of Commodore Vanderbilt.

In the critical year of 1859, when Abraham Lincoln began to rise in a prominent and impressive position as a possible and available Presidential nominee of the recently organized Republican party, the friends of Dr. Edward Wallace in the Philadelphia area, aware of his rather direct connection with Lincoln through his brother, Dr. William Smith Wallace of Springfield, Illinois, urged him to ascertain the views of Mr. Lincoln on the question of the protective tariff, an issue that seemed to be very vital to their interests.

It appears that in his eagerness for the nomination of Lincoln, his friend and promoter, Jesse Fell, who was largely responsible for Lincoln's candidacy, had intimated to the iron, steel and manufacturing interests

in Pennsylvania, that Lincoln would meet their wishes on the protective tariff. It is not known whether Lincoln was aware of these assurances; he probably was not.

In any case, the Republican industrial leaders of Pennsylvania were not satisfied with indirect intimations—they wanted personal assurance from Lincoln himself. Pennsylvania was an important factor in national politics. The leaders were not particularly favorable to Seward's nomination. He was considered to be too radical, although his candidacy was strongly advocated in New England and New York. Besides, Simon Cameron, a native son of Pennsylvania, was the choice of many industrial leaders and was destined to receive the fifty-six votes of the Pennsylvania delegates as a "favorite son" on the first ballot of the Chicago nominating convention.

Meanwhile, Illinois was laying far-reaching plans and was urging other States to join her in pushing through the nomination of her own Springfield lawyer, "Honest Abe."

Although the slavery question did not appear to be so all-important in certain circles before the days of John Brown's raid in mid-October, 1859, after which the lines were more sharply drawn, the tariff issue was considered to be of paramount concern in the industrial commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Had these men known the background of Lincoln's early political career, their anxiety would have been unnecessary.

As early as 1844 Lincoln had gone to his old home in Indiana where his mother and only sister were

buried, and had there made stump speeches in order to carry that State for Henry Clay, the great advocate of the protective tariff and the American system. A local newspaper at that time stated that Lincoln had advocated the Whig policy and had "pointed out the advantages of Protective Tariff." A hearer summarized one of Lincoln's speeches during the Henry Clay campaign for the Presidency in these words: "I may not live to see it, but give us a protective tariff and we will have the greatest country the sun ever shone upon."

These were Lincoln's views in 1844. But the men who were weighing the possibility of his candidacy for the Presidency in 1859, either did not know his earlier views or wanted to be assured that he had not changed his mind since Henry Clay of Kentucky ran on the Whig ticket and had been defeated for the Presidency by the first dark horse, James K. Polk.

For that reason some of the influential friends of Dr. Edward Wallace of the Philadelphia area requested him to find out from his brother in Springfield, Illinois, what Abraham Lincoln's views on the tariff question really were. Carl Sandburg says that it is quite probable that Lincoln "had almost forgotten there was a tariff question." At least he did not seem to realize how large the matter loomed in the eyes of the industrial and political leaders in the East until Dr. William Smith Wallace took his brother's letter of inquiry to Lincoln.

The answer that followed constitutes the substance of the Lincoln letter which has been in the possession of members of the Wallace family up to this time.

THE LINCOLN LETTER

Office of the Circuit Clerk
and Recorder of
Dewitt County, Illinois

Clinton, October 11, 1859

"Dr. Edward Wallace:

My dear Sir:

I am here just now attending court. Yesterday, before I left Springfield, your brother, Dr. William S. Wallace, showed me a letter of yours, in which you kindly mention my name, inquire for my tariff views, and suggest the propriety of my writing a letter upon the subject. I was an old Henry Clay tariff Whig. In old times I made more speeches on that subject than on any other. I have not since changed my views. I believe yet, if we could have a moderate, carefully adjusted protective tariff, so far acquiesced in as not to be a perpetual subject of political strife, squabbles, changes, and uncertainties, it would be better for us. Still it is my opinion that just now the revival of that question will not advance the cause itself, or the man who revives it.

"I have not thought much on the subject recently, but my general impression is that the necessity for a protective tariff will ere long force its old opponents to take it up; and then its old friends can join in and establish it on a more firm and durable basis. We, the



DR. WILLIAM SMITH WALLACE
Lincoln's Brother-in-law

old Whigs, have been entirely beaten out on the tariff question, and we shall not be able to re-establish the policy until the absence of it shall have demonstrated the necessity for it in the minds of men heretofore opposed to it. With this view, I should prefer to not now write a public letter on the subject. I therefore wish this to be considered confidential. I shall be very glad to receive a letter from you.

Very truly,

A. LINCOLN"

After receiving this statement from A. Lincoln, Dr. Edward Wallace was rather puzzled, because of the request that it be "considered confidential." How could he assure his friends in Pennsylvania of the Presidential candidate's views?

To solve this dilemma, Dr. Edward Wallace wrote a second letter to his brother, requesting him to find out before the nominating convention whether he might use Lincoln's previous letter on the tariff question even though it was supposed to have been written in confidence. He received the following reply, in which Lincoln with characteristic candor wrote four days before the Republican National Convention in Chicago that he did not care who saw his former letter.

LINCOLN'S SECOND LETTER

TO DR. EDWARD WALLACE

Springfield, Illinois, May 12, 1860

"Dr. Edward Wallace:

My dear Sir:

Your brother, Dr. W. S. Wallace, shows me a letter of yours in which you request him to inquire if you may use a letter of mine to you in which something is said upon the tariff question. I do not precisely remember what I did say in that letter, but I presume I said nothing substantially different from what I shall say now.

"In the days of Henry Clay, I was a Henry Clay tariff man, and my views have undergone no material change upon that subject. I now think the tariff question ought not to be agitated in the Chicago convention, but that all should be satisfied on that point with a presidential candidate whose antecedents give assurance that he would neither seek to force a tariff law by executive influence, nor yet to arrest a reasonable one by a veto or otherwise. Just such a candidate I desire shall be put in nomination. I really have no objection to these views being publicly known, but I do wish to thrust no letter before the public now upon any subject. Save me from the appearance of obtrusion, and I do not care who sees this or my former letter.

Yours very truly,

A. LINCOLN"

Office of the Circuit Clerk and Recorder
OF
DEWITT COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

Clinton, Oct. 11th 1859

Dr. Edward Wallace:

My dear Sir:

I am here, just now, attending court. Yesterday, before I left Springfield, your brother, Dr. William S. Wallace, showed me a letter of yours, in which you kindly mention my name, inquiring for my tariff views, and suggest the propriety of my writing a letter upon the subject. I was an old Henry Clay tariff whig. In old times I made more speeches on that subject, than on any other. I have not since changed my views. I believe yet, if we could have a moderate, carefully adjusted, protective tariff, so far as concerns us, as to not be a perpetual subject of political strife, squabbles, charges, and uncertainties, it would be better for us. Still, it is my opinion that, just now, the revival of that question, will not advance the cause itself, or the man who revives it. I have not thought much upon the subject recently; but my general impression is, that the necessity for a protective tariff will, ere long, force its old opponents to take it up; and then its old friends can join in, and establish it on a more firm and durable basis.

THE LINCOLN

Yes, the old whigs, have been entirely beaten out on
the tariff question; and we shall not be able to
re-establish the policy, until the absence of it,
shall have demonstrated the necessity for it, in
the minds of men heretofore opposed to it.
With this view, I should prefer, to not now,
write a public letter upon the subject. I therefore
wish this to be considered confidential—
I shall be very glad to receive a letter from
you—
Yours truly
A. Lincoln.

LETTER

THE PRESERVATION OF THE LETTER

The subsequent strange history of the "confidential letter" in my possession is worth noting. Doubtless the contents of the letter were revealed during the campaign of 1860 and had some influence on Pennsylvania's ultimate decision in favor of Lincoln's nomination and election. The letter itself was placed by Dr. Edward Wallace in a book in his library, apparently without the knowledge of any one else. After his death in 1872, his wife and four children continued to live in Philadelphia. One son, John, died in New York in 1909. At last only two unmarried daughters remained, dividing their latter days between a summer cottage at Spring Lake, New Jersey, and a Spruce street residence in Philadelphia. In 1928, within two months of each other, these two—Margaret Wallace and Mary Hamilton Wallace—died leaving the great part of their considerable estate to church institutions.

When in 1931 the executors of the estate were dismantling the summer cottage at Spring Lake and the books were removed from the shelves of the living room, a letter fell out of an old volume. This letter, addressed to Dr. Edward Wallace, bore the signature of A. Lincoln. It was the Tariff Letter of 1859, in perfect condition—every word as legible as though it had been written yesterday. The church beneficiaries

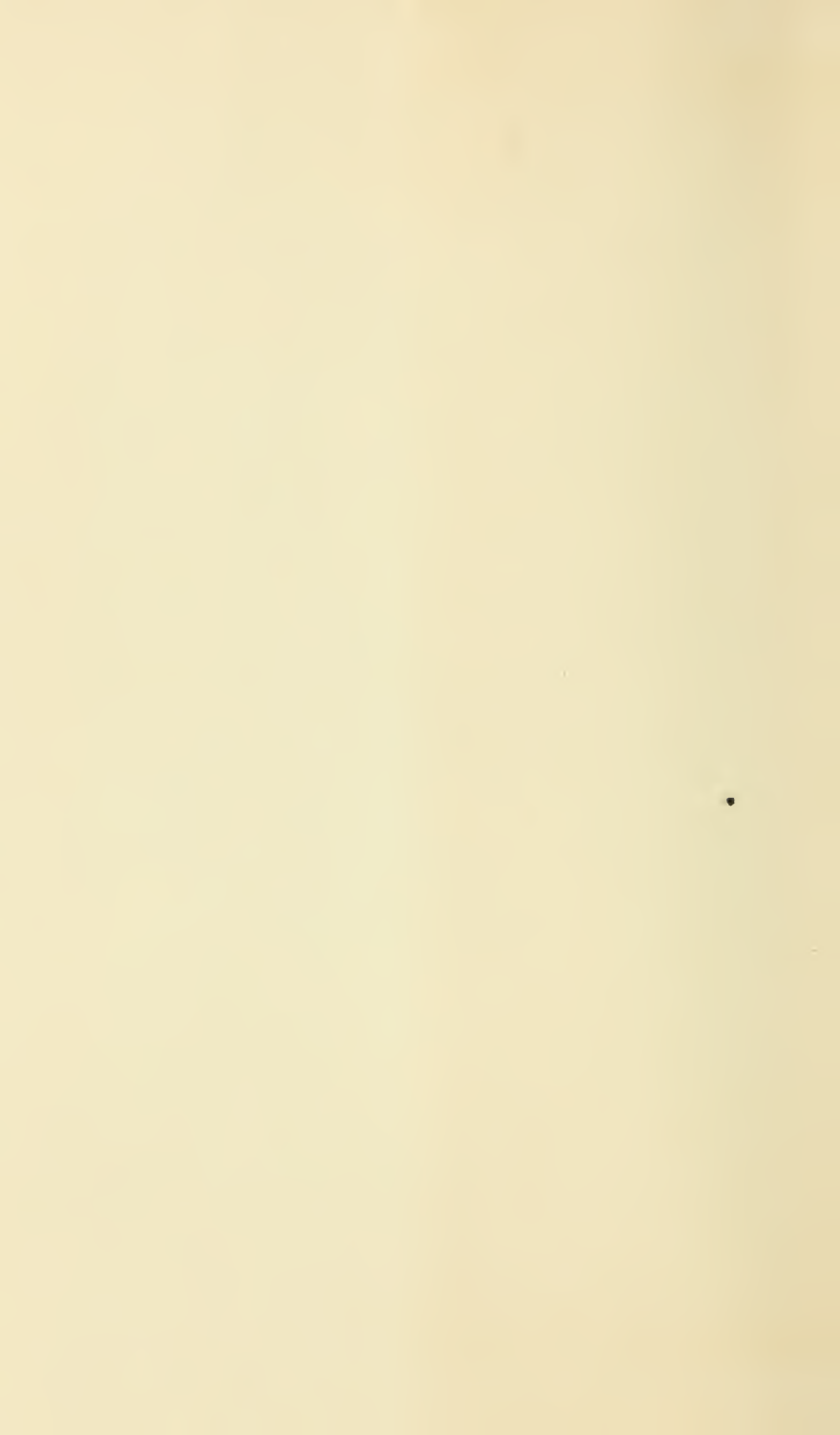
of Mary Hamilton Wallace's will consented to sell it at an appraised value to a member of the Wallace family, and thus it came to me, a granddaughter of George Wallace, a brother of the doctors.

This is the story of my letter written by Abraham Lincoln in one of the critical and decisive years of his life, on a question of great public concern. It was written in confidence—a letter long concealed in good faith—a letter accidentally rediscovered after seventy years—a letter remaining in the same family from the time it was first written—a letter cherished for its intrinsic value because it was written by the hand and reveals the mind of America's Great Emancipator and Savior of the Union, Abraham Lincoln.



DR. EDWARD WALLACE
To whom the Lincoln letter was addressed.





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